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ABSTRACT

This review of the literature on language uniformity investigates the controversy surrounding the issue of making English an official language in the United States and the consequences that would follow such a practice. The review looks at the basic arguments of making English the "official" language and offers an understanding of a rhetorical issue of communication: the shared symbol system of a culture. The review examines the rhetorical, intercultural and language science perspectives of language development and describes possible outcomes which would arise from making English the official language, citing the examples of the states where English is already an official language and the support for passage of such a resolution in the states with a heavy Latin American population, Florida and California. The review reveals the difficulty of demanding a standard dialect, since the diversity of the country and the dynamics of English, as used in America, preclude codifying the language. The review also discusses the activities of the U.S. English group, headed by the semanticist and former senator, S. I. Hayakawa, who believes that making English official will strengthen America's cultural position in the world. The review concludes that educators should develop improved strategies in English instruction and allow language to experience dynamic change--free from legislative restrictions. (Fifty references are attached.) (KEH)

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DIALECT AND CULTURE: VOICE AND ARTICULATION AS COMPONENTS OF A PERCEIVED NATIONAL LANGUAGE

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BY

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Introduction

As a group of the eighteenth century's most progressive political practitioners were formulating the document that would become our United States Constitution unity was a major issue. Unity of purpose, unity of goals, unity of people--states united in agreement of ensuring liberty of speech, religion, press, assembly, and conscience. Controversies concerning what should and should not be placed in the Constitution raged as each representative had a particualr issue to advocate. Now, over two hundred years later, there are groups of avocates that have added another element to the idea of unity: language, the English language. Newsweek reported the seriousness of the new controversy as follows:

> --nowhere does the U.S. Constitution provide for an official language, though citizens of the infant republic certainly spoke tongues other than English. Ever since, foreign inflections have been as American as apple pie. But today the melting pot is boiling over with resentment toward non-English speakers (Salholz, et. al., 22)

Students of intercultural communication read the following paragraph, or one like it, as they begin their study of the dynamic relationship of communication and culture:

> The relation between language and culture is important, inasmuch as language an its categories filter out reality, shaping ideas and organizing reality by the lines and boundaries that linguistic systems draw. Every culture has a language, although of the more than three thousand language communities on the earth, over one-fourth have yet to be written (Dodd, 46).

Human beings rely on language to build not only transmittable messages, but also to build an identity with others who share the same language. Formalized languages such as English, Spanish, French and so forth, not only have a quality related to a geographic or cultural region, but have a sense of personality. We strongly identify with being "English-speaking" as well as being "American." Americans have never felt obliged to re-label the language to "Americanese," or even "American English." This has usually been attributed to our "melting pot" culture made from the influences of many cultures.

In recent years efforts have begun to take seriously the idea that language is the filter of our reality in the United States and that every citizen should use that filter to construct "official" reality, as exemplified by Senator Walter D. Huddleston's proposed amendment. One of the most recent state efforts was California's Proposition 63, which many labeled a reaction to the influx of Hispanics and Asians to that state (Andrews, 23). Before Proposition 63 several states and municipalities had passed official language statues, including Illinois, Indiana, Virginia, Nebraska, Kentucky, Georgia, and such cities as Los Altos, California, and Elmira, New York. One can understand why states with large immigrant populations, especially the border states of the Southwest and Florida might have passed statutes as mere reaction to heavy immigration, but that does not fully explain the widespread movement to make English "official." The purpose of this paper is to look at the basic arguments of this movement and to come to an understanding of its rhetorical issue of communication: the shared symbol system of a culture.

Method

This study is an investigation of the controversy surrounding the issue of making English an official language and the consequences that follow in the actual practice of making a language official. Consideration of real rather than

ideal dialect development are viewed in order to better analyze and describe possible outcomes. As the rhetorical movement toward official status for English grows, cultural and language development studies should begin to address the changes that are supposed to take place. This survey will view the rhetorical dimension of the English as Official Language Movement and then discuss some of the language development, including language science questions, that will surely arise.

The search for literature has included four academic libraries and the DIALOG and BRS national computer searches. Since the controversy is current the researchers continue to follow the progress of the official language movement and the rise of counter movements from the rhetorical, intercultural and language science perspective of the messages.

The Problem

During November, 1988 the citizens of Florida, Arizona and Colorado passed resolutions making English the official language of each of their states (Salholz, 22). There are now seventeen states that have passed such resolutions. However, there are twenty other states that have similar measures awaiting passage. These resolutions would limit government document and public "discourse" to English. "In the process, the movement has inflamed nativist sentiment--and triggered unease among ethnic minorities (Salholz, 22).

Support for making English the "official" language has been strongest in those states we would expect: California, especially the southern section, and Florida. Both of these states have high concentration of Spanish-speaking people from Latin American countries. In some areas Latin American pressure groups have forced local governments to conduct a considerable amount of public business in Spanish as well as English. This effort has usually been assisted by politicians seeking the votes of the Spanish-speaking population (Let's Say Adios, 154).

Bilingual services go beyond the use of Spanish and English tax forms and court translators. Many communities have emergency 911 service in other languages. Federal voting laws require that communities with high concentrations of non-English speakers must have ballots printed in prevalent languages. New York City has ballots in Spanish and San Francisco has ballots in three languages, including Chinese. Supporters of the "official English" movement see these bilingual services as removing some of the motivation that earlier immigrants had to learn English quickly in order ro participate in community life (Let's Say Adios, 154).

Although several communities have small groups who actively advocate the official status for English, the most well organized group is U.S. English (U.S.E.) headed by former U.S. Senator, S. I. Hayakawa. Hayakawa brings a background of successful politics and years of language study as a semanticist to the movement. He contends that the U.S. has had something close to linguistic uniformity throughout its history, but that uniformity must be protected and complete uniformity must be strived for. U.S.E. scorns the idea that biculturalism is not the same as bilingualism. Culture is not a thing you have two of, using one culture one moment and another culture the next moment (Carlin, 822). Hawaii and New Mexico are officially bilingual, both having large populations that speak languages other than, or in addition to, English. It can also be said that these two states have at least two cultures, each that existing side by side (Erhlich, 117).

Hayakawa persists that an official status for English would strengthen the American culture, and by strengthening the culture will strengthen America's cultural position in the world. Hayakawa and U.S.E. persist that assimilation is important to strengthening the culture. Gerda Bikales, executive director of U.S.E., believes that an official status for English would reiinforce the

connection between citizens and a national identity (Erhlich, 116). Bikales also insists that assimilation is stifled by self-sufficient barrios with Miami and Los Angeles being prime examples. Separation is heightened, adds Bikales, by language separatists aided by ethnic mass media, Spanish-language advertising and government bililngual programs (Erhlich, 117).

The bilingual education programs give U.S.E. significant trouble. Stanley Diamond, a former Hayakawa aid and director of the California effort, wants California to redirect $500,000,000 in bilingual education support to bilingual programs that get students into English speaking classrooms in a year or less. Standard federal programs aim for about three years, depending on student progress (Erhlich, 117). The use of federal funds is seen by U.S.E. as one of the institutionalized barriers to assimilation that weakens the culture.

The support for official English has much local and state voter appeal. It is led by credible persons with strong opinions. The basic arguments could be summarized in four statements:

1. Multiple languages and ethnic separations threaten America's heritage and erode English as a unifying force.
2. Immigrants would learn English faster if they were immersed in it and if bilingual classes were severely cut back.
3. Bilingual ballots postpone integration of non-English speaking adults into the U.S. political mainstream.
4. Official English would not apply to private business or abolish health and safety services (McBee, 64).

The last argument could be taken as mere reaction to criticism of opponents. When cornered about what he meant by "official language," especially in light of 911 emergency services, Hayakawa quickly responded that social services and private activities would not be affected. "In an official context

you are going to use English," he said. "When you are courting your wife, you can use any language you like." (Erhlich, 117).

Opposition

"English is safe while it is honest, vivid, and concise," argues Harold Evans (64). It is the basic question of integrity of argument that so strongly pull together the opposition. Evans points out that of our 600,000 words, half have foreign origins. Most of the opponents of the "official" movement, see it not as a move to unify, but as strictly divisive based on prejudice of language and culture. The U.S.E. movement is being characterized by many opponents as much more like those early movements aginst German, Irish, Italian, and Jewish groups. This type of movement is seen as using statutes binding all citizens to enhance the role of English without defining the role (Erhlich, 118).

The role of English in American society is the center of much of the opposition's argument construct. Since there are several examples of bilingual cultures, or at least the tolerance of two languages, it would seem that uniformity could come without forcing a population. Examples of countries supporting two language-culture groups are English and French in Canada; Walloons and Flemish in Belgium; Basques and Catalonians in Spain. The Soviet Union is the prime example of a nation trying to unify many language groups using Russian as the "official" langauge (Carlin, 822).

David R. Carlin, Jr. in The Christian Century wrote about the concern with Americans' unification by language.

> If American culture possesses the magnetism that it clearly had once upon a time, newcomers will be more than eager to master English. They won't have to be driven to it kicking and screaming. On other hand, if that magnetism has been lost, all the English language amendments in the world won't halp. Quite the contrary, they will

hurt. For they give the signal that we've lost not only our cultural attractiveness, but our very will to conquer through attractions (823).

Support for the moves to amend the Constitution and especially to enact state statues of official languages has grown out of the noticeable numbers of non-English speaking immigrants. On the surface one could argue that large numbers of persons refusing to learn English could weaken the cultural life of the nation. However, there may not be evidence that non-English speakers refuse to learn the language. In 1985, the Rand Corporation did a study that shows that 90% of first generation Mexican-Americans had learned English well and that half of the second generation spoke only English (Let's Say Adios, 154). "Immigrant parents invariably want their kids to learn English and learn it well," according to Isaura Santiago, who leads bilingual studies at Columbia University Teacher's College (Erhlich, 118).

Latin American parents know very well that in order for their children to succeed educationally and economically they must succeed with the English language. One Houston mother, a native of Mexico, put it this way, "I want them to learn English well because they live here and they have to. I want them to learn Spanish because that is their heritage" (Collins, 3ff.).

The American Civil Liberties Union sees the U.S.E. movement as stimulating disenfrancisement. The federal voting laws wee designed to help citizens feel more comfortable reading ballots therefore encouraging voter participation. The complex nature of American ballots would be intimidating to citizens whose English is shaky (Erhlich, 120).

Geoffrey D. Nunberg, editor of the American Heritage Dictionary, agrees that education is crucial to the success of immigrant citizens, but points out that a pool of bilingual citizens would be good for American society and for

world business. Nunberg sums his argument by insisting that official status for English is both dangerous and absurd. In short, "the English language needs official protection about as much as the Boston Celtics need elevator shoes" (Erhlich, 120).

Opposition arguments can be summed up along four lines:

1. Making English official would divide people and tarnish this nation's legacy of tolerance and diversity.
2. Newcomers want to learn English, yet mandating English would do nothing to provide more classes to teach them.
3. U.S. Voting Rights Act requires translation of ballot materials to prevent reoccurrences of past discrimination.
4. Such an action could jeopardize multilingual police, fire, and court services and the use of foreign signs in stores (McBee, 64).

Analysis

"Ethnocentrism . . . refers to a group or individual attitude of superiority over other groups or individuals (Dodd, 47). This particular attitude seems to pervade the rhetoric of the U.S.E. movement. This may not be racial in origin, but a type of scapegoating. Indeed, when a well-known writer-educator-politician, such as S. I. Hayakawa, declares that there is something wrong with our language, we, the citizens who recognize him, listen.

It would be simple to say that the U.S.E. movement is a reaction to Hispanics and Asian immigration. That would be obvious. However, I suggest that even though that may be part of the motivation, it is at heart a move by one subculture to have superiority over another, not based on race, but educational elitism. The "we" versus "them" pits those who use English well against those that do not. The fact that Hayakawa argues that America has been "close" to

uniformity in the past shows a single-mindedness that would disallow the dynamic growth of English, in many circumstances, but most especially, official circumstances.

This particular movement seems to be so elite that it supposes that what happens in private life will not affect public life. If language does help construct reality for us, then does separating official public language from private language develop two sets of reality? If uniformity of culture is the goal f U.S.E., it would seem that the ultimate goal would eventualy be to have both public and private business conducted in English. This is not the goal, according to U.S.E. leaders. Therefore, the situation could be boiled down to: "When we who use English well must come into contact with them - - those who don't use English well - - we want to make you have to use English." The separatism may not be on the part of the language culture groups, but on the part of a highly educated, politically active, strong economic group that wishes public reality to stem from one symbol system.

The argument for uniformity could still be palatable, except that there is yet another contradiction: education. If cultural uniformity for the good of the nation is the major goal, then extensive education in language and culture would be needed. However, one of U.S.E.'s goals on the state level is to cut back bilingual education. It is impossible to determine how long it takes for a culture to develop and its language to stabilize. The "official language" movement leaders want students in English-only classrooms in a year or less. Again, the elitist would want to impose arbitrary "Sink or Swim" rules on the pu public person.

Last, but certainly not least, the public ballot box is under attack from the "official language" movement. Although some native English speakers have difficulty understanding intricate ballots, the "official language" movement sees

ballots in other languages as truly a sign of weakness. Rather than a democratic process, or right of the citizens, the elitist sees voting as an earned privilege. The Voting Rights Act grew out of discrimination based on national origin. The "official language" movement would have the ballots a test unto itself of the citizen's readiness to enter the elite sub-group.

Implicit in the movement for English as an "official" language is the premise that communication is a dynamic process and therefore in change. That is, "... living languages change over time" (MacKay, p. 15). In the molar view of this process one need only be reminded of the attempts to change communication through legislative acts. Others, we have seen, call for a quiet and orderly "melting pot" scenario in the move towards a national language. A molecular analysis of the dynamics involved in changing our language should provide us with information on a decision towards evoking a national language.

There are numerous definitions of language based on the researcher's approach. A popular definition states that: "Language is a set of symbols that a community has agreed upon to designate and describe people, objects, actions, concepts, and relationships of all kinds. The symbols are organized and arranged according to principles that permit an infinite number of combinations" (Byrne, et. al., 20).

We can condense the above definition to an agreed upon set of symbols between two or more participants. We are all acquainted with the components of a language: phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Speech science, in particular, has studied the area of phonology in detail.

Phonology is the sound system used in a language. Specifically, it relates to meaningful sounds or speech phonemes, i.e. consonants and vowels. Phonemes, by definition, are associated with speech intelligibility: the amount of information exchanged between speaker and listener. The literature is replete with scientific

investigations of speech sounds (Van Hattan, ch. 6). Speech sounds of our language are produced through the process of articulation. Thus we see the hierarchy from articulating a sound to producing the phonemes of speech to communicating in oral language.

A very important aspect in conjunction with the speech act is the nonverbal message, specifically vocal cues. Communication is both verbal and vocal with each aspect contributing to the language process. The vocal cues or how it is said is "what is lost when speech is written down (Mehrabian, 53). This includes both pitch and loudness of voice and comprise the prosodic features of the language.

Both voice and articulation contribute greatly to differences in dialects. A dialect is a multi-dimensional variation in language. They may differ in usage of phonology, morphology, syntax and prosody. The term dialect represents a negative connotative value for many. It simply describes a variation in speech. No one is "dialect-neutral." In the United States we find three large dialect areas: Southern, Eastern, and general American. According to Thomas, there are probably at least ten major dialect areas: Eastern New England, New York City, Middle Atlantic, Southern, Western Pennsylvania, Southern Mountain, Central Midland, Northwest, Southwest, and North Central (Thomas, ch. 3). It is clear that there is dialect diversity and this has existed at all times in the history of all languages. How then do we arrive at a standard dialect? MacKay presents the premise that a choice of a standard dialect is made as the one spoken by the people with power and money (MacKay, p. 21). This is referred to as the prestige dialect and the one with the greatest social acceptance. The idea espoused here is that individuals will willingly gravitate towards this standard dialect to identify with those with power and money. We perceive people differently from various dialect areas and have an expectation based on their speech. A study by

Burgoon and Saine resulted in the following:

1. People don't have a preference for their own regional dialect; they don't consistently rate it highest.
2. General American speech (what Midwesterners speak) is generally viewed as more credible than Southern or New England speech.
3. The speech of native-born speakers is rated as more dynamic, more aesthetically pleasing, and reflective of higher socio-intellectual status than that of speakers with foreign accents.
4. Both blacks and whites rate speakers of standard English higher than speakers using a nonstandard dialect (including black dialect). Black speakers who use standard English are assumed to be white.
5. People with a New York accent are rated more dynamic but less sociable than those with a Southern drawl.
6. People speaking with a New York accent or Central U. S. pattern are rated as more competent than speakers with a New England or Southern accent.
7. Finally, the effects of dialect on a receiver's judgment are short-term (80, 81).

It is important to note that we have been experiencing a diffusion of regional dialects. The factors of increased mobility and the electronic media have exposed people to other dialects (Hixon, et. al., 183). The melding of aspects of various dialects has been accomplished, for the most part, through a descriptive rather than prescriptive approach. The descriptive process dictates an acceptance of the "native" dialect coupled with a presentation of the movement dialect. Importantly, there is no value judgment of either dialect. The

prescriptive approach makes a statement that one dialect is preferred when compared to another. The later approach has been associated with problems including the difficulty of cultural/dialect separation. This approach has not been successful in achieving dialect change. The need for improved methodology in addressing change in voice and articulation components in dialect has been identified.

Conclusion

The movement for English as a national, or official, language has strong support. That support has picked up momentum as highly visible leaders in the education and political communities have taken up the cause of public language. The idea of making clear our shared system of language does not seem repulsive on the surface, especially since the vast majority of immigrants works so hard to learn English. It is not logical to assume that uniformity will come based on demanding English as the public or official language.

Language is a dynamic process. The difficulty of demanding a standard dialect has been seen and a prescriptive approach for English as a national language will meet equal resistance. We need to develop improved strategies in English instruction. And most importantly, we must allow language to experience dynamic change - free of legislative restrictions.

The diversity of the country and the dynamics of English, as it is used in America, precludes codifying the language. It is not for us to assume that an immigrant will become more a part of the uniform society just because he speaks English. Since all of our experiences affect our perceptual filter (Dodd, ch. 1), we should not assume that the language of private life does not matter. If uniformity of culture, based on language, is the goal, then it should matter what language a man uses to court his wife.

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